

Job 9:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life.

Analysis

Job declares self-forgetfulness in despair: 'Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life.' The phrase 'though I were perfect' (tam-ani, תָּמֵאֲנִי) uses the same word God used to describe Job (1:8). 'I would not know my soul' (lo eda naphshi, לֹא־אֶדָּע נַפְשִׁי) expresses alienation from self—Job cannot recognize himself. He would 'despise my life' (ma'as chayyay, מַאֲסַי חַיָּי), rejecting his own existence.

Suffering has disoriented Job so completely that even his self-understanding collapses. He knows he's perfect (righteous) yet cannot affirm it—his experience contradicts his conscience. This creates cognitive dissonance: inner witness says 'innocent,' external circumstances say 'guilty.' The conflict generates despair. Job cannot trust his own assessment of himself when God seems to contradict it.

The gospel addresses this identity crisis: our righteousness doesn't rest on self-assessment but on Christ's imputed righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). We are simultaneously sinners (in ourselves) and righteous (in Christ). Job's struggle to know his own soul finds resolution when believers' identity is secured in Christ, not in self-perception or circumstances.

Historical Context

Ancient identity was corporately and externally defined—by family, tribe, reputation, possessions. Job's loss of all these markers creates identity crisis. Who

is he when stripped of all external indicators? The question anticipates Christian teaching that identity rests in Christ, not circumstances.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How do we maintain sense of identity when circumstances contradict our conscience?
2. What does Job's self-alienation teach about suffering's power to distort self-understanding?
3. In what ways does union with Christ provide stable identity independent of circumstances?

Interlinear Text

דָּבָר	וְיִי אֵל	לֹא יָדָעְתִּי	וְלֹא יָדָעְתִּי	נַפְשִׁי	וְאֵל אֲדָאֵר
Though I were perfect	H589	H3808	yet would I not know	my soul	I would despise
H8535			H3045	H5315	H3988
חַיִּי					
my life					
H2416					

Additional Cross-References

Job 1:1 (Parallel theme): There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

Job 7:21 (Parallel theme): And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.

Proverbs 28:26 (Parallel theme): He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.

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